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Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

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● (1530)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.)): Welcome to meeting 109 of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. We're continuing our study on barriers facing women in politics.

Before we start, I'm just going to let you know that our report on the economic security of women was tabled earlier in the House by our chair, Ms. Vecchio, who is not able to be here this afternoon.

I'm pleased to welcome from Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie, Thérèse Mailloux, chair of the board of directors, and Esther Lapointe; and as individuals, we have the Honourable Joanne Bernard and the Honourable Deborah Grey.

I'd like to welcome you all.

I will now turn the floor over to you, Madame Mailloux, for your opening statement, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Thérèse Mailloux (Chair, Board of directors , Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie): Thank you, Madam Chair.

The *Groupe femmes, politiques et democratie* would like to thank the House Standing Committee on the Status of Women for this invitation.

The underrepresentation of women in positions of influence and power is at the very heart of our group's mission. In addition to its education and training mandate, the group has been actively working to promote parity among political parties and elected officials in Quebec for a few years. For the past three years in the month of April—the month that women won the right to vote in Quebec—, it has organized activities at the National Assembly. First, it launched the March for Parity movement, in 2016; then it formed a coalition of Partners for Parity, in 2017; met each party leader before the upcoming election; and lastly officially submitted a parity bill in 2018.

The March for Parity now brings together 20 Partners for Parity organizations, which represent close to 500 organizations and 1.3 million people who are committed to supporting all steps toward parity and who are calling for a law to guarantee parity between men and women in all public decision-making bodies.

These actions have borne fruit. In April 2018, the National Assembly unanimously adopted a motion affirming, roughly translated:

> That the National Assembly is committed to making parity an objective in all sectors of society;

For the upcoming elections on October 1, 2018, the leaders of the political parties have also committed to nominating female candidates to achieve 40/60 parity or as close to that as possible. Public opinion has often come out in favour of parity among political candidates during these events. For example, in mid-April, 69% of respondents in a *Léger-Le Devoir* survey said they believed that political parties should have as many female candidates as male candidates.

Systemic and structural factors impede women's access to politics by creating invisible barriers. Chief among the barriers—the greatest, we think—are the political parties' recruitment and selection processes. The world of politics has always been dominated by men who tend to replicate the system by recruiting candidates from their networks, using methods that are not suited to women, and operating with bias and prejudices. In order for women to achieve full parity, the rules of the game have to be changed and room has to be made in an arena that is much sought after by men. Responsibility for this change cannot rest solely on women or on so-called natural progress.

We believe that the political parties should be required to deliver results: they should be legally required to field an equal number of female and male candidates. That way, after an election, the number of elected representatives would be in the parity zone, between 40% and 60%, or ideally between 45% and 55% for both sexes. To bring about this change and field a balanced candidate list, the political parties could temporarily be given additional financial resources in order to take concrete steps well in advance of election periods.

The first-past-the-post voting system is not a barrier to parity. Numerous experts have pointed out that several strategies can be used, and have been used effectively under the current voting system to increase the number of female candidates.

Just as important as parity in the legislative branch, women must also achieve parity in the government, the executive branch, in light of the important policy decisions made there, particularly in the choice, presentation, and implementation of laws, policies and programs.

While there have been cabinets with parity in Quebec, other provinces, and in the House of Commons, this of course is an individual decision that can be revoked at any time. We therefore recommend that the principle of parity in cabinet be immediately established in law.

In our opinion, substantially and quickly increasing the number of women in legislative assemblies is the most powerful driver in achieving true equality between men and women. This is the only way to bring about the other changes that are needed, such as a respectful culture, reducing harassment, hostile confrontations, and ultimately changing rules such as absolute party discipline. It is thanks to the few female MPs in office, with the help of some male allies, that some improvements to the schedule and the parliamentary calendar have been made.

● (1535)

Once women achieve parity, they will also implement or perfect policies and measures to create an environment that is conducive to their participation, in particular to promote their work-life balance.

In conclusion, experiences around the world show us that there are long-term solutions to the underrepresentation of women in politics. They involve restrictive measures, whether they are called quotas or parity legislation. The political parties hold the key to this transformation, however, since they are the ones that select and recruit female candidates, and also form governments and adopt laws.

Success depends on their commitment, and most of the time this does not occur without the impetus of and pressure from the public and the women's movement. That is our collective challenge, we maintain, for everyone, both women and men, from all backgrounds and all parts of society: to make parity between men and women an essential condition for the democratic exercise of power and governance.

Thank you.

We will be pleased to answer your questions.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much.

We're now going to turn to Ms. Bernard, for seven minutes.

Hon. Joanne Bernard (As an Individual): Thank you.

I don't have a word written down, because I've lived it for the last three and a half years.

I came into politics on the cusp of my 50th birthday. I had wanted to put my name on a ballot since the age of eight. At the age of eight, I wrote then-minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau to complain about the seal hunt. About three weeks later, I received a letter back, in my eight-year-old mind from him personally, but we all know it was from a staffer. However, at that point in time, I made a decision that some day, in some way, shape, or form, I was going to run politically. I didn't know what level of government it was going to be. I knew it was going to be more than the head girl status that I achieved at age 15.

I grew up and I went on and became a single mom for nine years, raising my son on income assistance while attending university: first, Mount Saint Vincent University, and then my master's at Acadia University. Both of those degrees were in political science because I still had that dream.

Then I moved on to the women's community and had a great career assisting women leaving domestic violence, helping young children who were witnesses to violence in the home, and gaining a reputation nationally through the Donner Foundation for my work in the non-profit sector.

At age 49, I ran for politics. I didn't know anyone in the riding association. I had not been approached. I had been sort of vetted by a couple of colleagues in the Liberal Party of Nova Scotia who were elected women at that time, two of the elected women in that party. I was mentored. I made a point of going out and speaking to Mary Clancy, and to Diana Whalen and Kelly Regan, and just getting their experiences. I tell you, the one that scared me the most, of course, was Mary's. Whether or not you agree with her politics, it was the first indication of what I might come up against as a woman in politics.

I won the nomination on February 2, 2012, and ran a campaign in September 2013. The first hint of what my life might be like if I won was founded on the campaign trail, because I had done tremendous work before that and I put it in my bio, as every one of us here has. I put in one sentence that caught the attention of someone in my riding. That sentence said, "married to Annette, mother of an adult son Taylor, and mother of five adopted cats". It wasn't the cats and it wasn't Taylor that brought the ire of the piece of hate mail to my desk as a candidate in 2013, it was the fact that I was married to Annette.

I received a piece of mail, beautifully written in what I assumed was a feminine font but I can't be sure, and she or he told me quite clearly, "You had my vote until I read that sentence." I took that piece of hate mail, which I had never really experienced before, although I certainly knew that homophobia was out there, and I did a positive tweet that night addressing it. *Huffington Post* picked it up, and I was able to turn something very negative into something very positive.

The night before October 8, 2013, I went to bed as a fine, upstanding leader in my community, and on October 8, 2013, went to bed as someone who was in it for myself, a thief, not there for the people. Overnight it changed. I wasn't the only one to experience it, but then I got appointed to a very volatile portfolio: community services. Any community services minister across Canada will tell you it is a very volatile portfolio, because you're dealing very intimately with people when they are at the very worst time of their lives. As someone who had taken advantages of the services of the department that I then led, the expectations for me were very high.

The sexism, misogyny, and homophobia that ensued over the months after coming into office took a tremendous toll on me. It took a tremendous toll on my partner and my son. My son at that time was 23. The first negative tweet that he saw, he took himself off social media, and then he stayed off and has stayed off because it still continues to this day. I will once in a while get a troll, but certainly not in the way it was.

● (1540)

I have been very vocal over the last three and a half or four years about what I've faced in homophobia, on which I took a very public stand in July 2015. I went very public on the six o'clock news about what I as a cabinet minister was experiencing. I can only imagine what's happening in our streets and our rural areas of Nova Scotia, if I was subjected to this. I was getting weekly calls in my constituency office, in my caucus office, and in my department office. The misogyny and the words that were directed at me....

Then you start to see it coming out in the Rachel Notleys of the world, in Kathleen Wynne, in Cathy Bennett, Rochelle Squires, in Saskatchewan. We all started talking to each other and saying we needed to tell our stories. So we did, and we started.

It's been well documented from one end of the country to the other, the cyber-bullying and the violence against women in the form of social media that has taken place in this country. It was to the point where, as a female minister, I was reticent in telling younger women to run for office. I quickly, thankfully, got over that, and just have said, "Eyes wide open, always. Do not ever let anyone tell you to get a thick skin, because that is condoning violence against women. The minute those attacks do not affect you in any way, shape, or form is the day to walk away from politics. It's as simple as that."

I was not re-elected in May of 2017, but I'm free of the political and partisan chains that I had. I do come out and talk about my experiences, and in some way, shape, or form hope that it helps the next generation of women politicians behind me.

● (1545)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much.

Ms. Grey, we look forward to your presentation. You have seven minutes.

Hon. Deborah Grey (As an Individual): Thank you very much.

It's good to be back on the Hill. It seems pretty funny to be sitting on this side of the table. Rather than being the griller, I am the grilled. I want to congratulate all of you on your election. It's an incredible opportunity that few get to experience, that's for sure.

I was raised in Vancouver by a single mom in the sixties. My father was a drunk, so I understand that and the pain that goes with it. I appreciate having a fabulous role model in my mother. It's just so good.

As for barriers for women in politics, it's interesting. I probably don't see it the way many of you do. I will talk about my experiences, of course.

I was on the plane coming down here with a women who is a professional accountant. She had her eight-year-old boy with her and she was, as she said, "ditching him off" to her mother, because she had two weeks of work. She's a professional accountant and she travels.

I'd say that is a barrier for women but not necessarily in politics. There are professional women, as you know, on the planes all the time. It's difficult for them to look after their family and make sure they're all well cared for.

I was elected the first Reform Party member of Parliament on March 13, 1989. I made Canadian history. I served as Canada's first female leader of the official opposition in 2000 and made Canadian history again. It was a surprise to me for sure, and my mother was stunned by it as well.

Barriers? There were. But as someone told me also on the plane the other day, "I guess you broke through them, Deb, somehow." And I did. That was what I knew. I spent almost 15 and a half years here as an MP. After four terms, I left on June 28, 2004, at the top of my game. I didn't want to be ushered out by the voters. That was the best way for me to go out.

I've now been out almost as long as I was in. Let me assure and comfort you all that there is life after politics, and it is good. I still do some speaking, but I'm happily semi-retired and living on Vancouver Island. I'm still riding my motorcycle, for those who want to know. I'm about to celebrate my 25th wedding anniversary in August.

I would like to tell you something about me as a woman today—what I am, what I am not—and about how I view barriers.

As to what I am, I am capable. I happen to be a woman, but I earned two university degrees. I taught school for a decade. I served here for a decade and a half. I juggled foster kids, marriage, stepchildren, and a career on the road. As you know, I was at the opposite end of the country.

I dealt with people who opposed me at every turn—Joanne, it is no fun—but as a capable woman, I learned to juggle, as many of you have. I don't do stress; I do life. That's what we call it.

Two, I'm competitive. If I play Scrabble or crib with you, I will play to the death.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Deborah Grey: I will. I love to win.

I don't mind losing, either. That probably suits us fairly well in federal life. If you are competitive, you are able to handle these things of nominations and getting elected. Women are often criticized for being competitive or assertive. They—whoever "they" are—have a word for that, but I won't say it now.

My philosophy is DSI—"don't sweat it"—because you know what? If you get offended and spend your life offended, I don't think you'll accomplish a whole lot. Nellie McClung, one of the Famous Five, said, "Never retreat, never explain, never apologize. Get the thing done and let them howl."

Three, I am committed. I am committed to serving, to encouraging, and to mentoring, a gift that we have been given as women. Yes, I believe men and women have different gifts and different strengths. You can't run and cry, because you know what they'll say, at the first sign of danger or defeat. My job as a woman is to see it through, get it done, help a constituent, fight for my marriage, and spoil my grandbabies.

Here is what I am not. I'm not a victim because I am a woman. I can stand on my own two feet. I have two feet. I can stand on them. I can fight my own battles and my own campaigns. Give me a playing field and I'll go toe to toe with anyone. Don't pity me, because if you do, I'll pity you for pitying me. We don't need pity as women.

Secondly, I am not a percentage or a number. Yes, I'm a woman. Yes, we happen to be 50% of the population, but I don't want to be on a quota system and have somebody say, "There's Deb Grey. She got elected because she was a woman."

If anyone introduced me to someone and said, "Please vote for Deb because she's a woman", they would see my south end going north. I actually don't want any part of that.

● (1550)

Let me tell you a real barrier to women—and some men—in politics: to be told by a man, no less, that I am unfit for public office because I happen to believe in religious freedom, because I happen to be pro-life. You know what? I am not unfit for public office, as a woman, clearly. I served four terms.

Do you know who should decide that, and the only ones who should decide whether I'm fit or unfit for public office? It's the voters. They should decide if I'm good enough to be in public office, and—you know what—I guess I was.

Thank you.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much to all of you.

We are going to start our round of questions.

Emmanuella, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): I'd like to thank the witnesses.

[*Translation*]

I will begin with you, Ms. Mailloux.

You said that the parties hold the key to achieving parity at all levels of government. You talked about quotas, but is there something else the political parties could do to achieve parity?

Ms. Thérèse Mailloux: Of course.

The *Groupe femmes, politique et démocratie* has been working on all kinds of other solutions for 20 years now. We conduct training, civic education, and general awareness activities. We have been doing that for 20 years, but the numbers have not changed.

In Quebec, the number of female representatives has not changed in 15 years. It climbed to 32%, but then fell back down to 27%. It is currently 29.6%, which is under the 30% mark. It seems we can never get over the 30% mark, despite the efforts of our group and other stakeholders in Quebec.

For several years, the government has invested in all kinds of programs. For instance, we have regional tables in each region that work hard to increase the representation of women in municipal elections. Grants are also provided to municipal groups to promote the election of more women in all municipal elections.

We are not the only ones saying this. It is documented in the literature, so stronger measures are needed, something with teeth, whether that means quotas, parity laws or financial incentives. I know this is not the case throughout Canada, but in Quebec, political parties are 75% publicly funded. The political parties are directly funded by taxpayers' dollars. So we can wonder whether fair or equal representation should not in turn be an obligation.

In short, we see a range of solutions, but the real driver is exerting pressure on the political parties. In Quebec, we are preparing for a general election to be held in early October. Our group has worked very hard to make the various political parties aware that parity is essential. The discussion about parity is quite lively in Quebec these days, I have to say. There were municipal elections. A woman was elected mayor of Montreal and several other women were elected mayors of major cities. There is parity on municipal council of major cities such as Quebec and Montreal.

The timing is very good to exert pressure on the political parties. According to the latest of figures, 48% of candidates are women. There is no law, but there has been tremendous pressure on the political parties. From now on, these parties will consider that they are missing out if they don't have enough women on their team.

What we are trying to say here is that exerting pressure on political parties can produce change.

● (1555)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Okay.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Ms. Bernard and Ms. Grey, first of all, it was really inspiring to hear you speak, very motivational. As a young woman, the youngest one in my party, I face a lot of the things that you described, and I try to have the mentality that you have, although sometimes it's not that easy.

I know that each of you ran. You're more recent, but you were active in political life a while back, so things have changed, I guess, in society since then.

Do you find that women were as engaged as men at the ground level or the grassroots level, or do you find that men were really over-represented as volunteers, in organizing campaigns, and in political life?

Hon. Joanne Bernard: What I have found—and it hasn't changed much since I did a paper on that very topic back in the early 2000s—is that women are the envelope stuffers, the bakers, and the organizers of the events. When it comes to policy decisions, in a lot of the riding associations that I have seen, there are some women but predominantly it is men.

I believe that is slowly changing. I think that the more women get elected and end their careers, whether they want to or not, the more they will circle back, bring the next generation up with them, and really be able to affect change within the grassroots system, which one hopes will translate to the political system as well.

Hon. Deborah Grey: Yes, I was here a long time ago, from 1989 until 2004. You might think that was way long ago. It is way long ago, but I had the best woman campaign manager. I would set her against anybody and be scared of her. She was tremendous.

I think that if you have that confidence.... You said that it was easy. I can assure you it wasn't easy all the time. Lots of times it's very difficult, here especially.

I have to say, I sat in the House with Mary Clancy forever. She was vicious to me. Could I say that again? Women are vicious to other women. I liked Mary. I had no problem with her. I sat with Alexa from there, but boy, I'll tell you, girl fights are ugly.

I want the best people for the job, whether they're running my campaign or whatever. I pretty well don't see whether they're male or female, or say that I want a woman here or a man there. I think women are coming forward more. Again, I want them to be capable. We say that men will run the show a lot of the time. What I find is—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): That is your time. I'm sorry.

Hon. Deborah Grey: Thank you.

You need to work with everyone.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

We're now going to go to our Conservative colleagues for seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you so much to each and every one of you for being here.

Deb, I'm going to start with you. You won your first by-election in 1989, and then, of course, you served faithfully until 2004. That's quite the career. Then, of course, as you mentioned, you set some history along the way. Notably, you were the first female leader of the official opposition. I want to congratulate you on that and thank you for making an incredible path forward for those of us who get to follow in your footsteps.

In your opening remarks, you talked about quotas. One of the conversations that I've had with women, or one of the things that I've been told by them, is that when they get to the boardroom table, let's say, just to pick that as a scenario, the men don't wonder why they got there. They got there because of merit. The women around the table, however, wonder whether they got there because there was a quota put in place that allowed them to be there because of their gender or whether they got there based on merit. The quota actually breeds insecurity among the women at the table.

Further to this, the men are able to use this as an opportunity to attack the women or to question their credentials or why they are at the table. They're able to say to their female colleagues, "You're here because you're a woman. What do you actually know?"

There are these types of comments and festering that takes place, if you will. Can you comment further on why you believe quotas are actually to the disadvantage of women?

● (1600)

Hon. Deborah Grey: I think I addressed that briefly by saying that I'm not a number. I'm not a percentage, so if anybody sees me as somebody...they might always wonder whether I got there just because I'm a woman. I don't want any part of that.

I have worked with incredibly capable women over the years. It's not for me to ask how they got there. It's for them to show me how they got there. It doesn't take long to spot somebody who's competent.

I'd say that if there's anyone who has difficulties with that as a woman, she needs to show, not tell everyone that she got there because she is a woman, but show that she is competent and that's exactly why she is there. If she's not, she may not last long, but competence is for me the absolute bottom line on some things.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Deb, if we don't use quotas, then are there other mechanisms by which we as women can overcome the barriers that are presented?

Hon. Deborah Grey: I think they can do that by being confident and not being afraid to put their names forward. Joanne said that when she was eight years old she thought about doing this all the way. Shannon Stubbs, who worked in my constituency office ages ago, was somebody who knew what she was doing. I look at her, after mentoring her for years, and now she's a member of Parliament, and I'm grateful for that.

But what she needed to show me, and what everyone needs to show me, is that she's not a number, she's not a percentage, she's not a "woman" but she's really darned good at what she does. I want to be able to see that. People just have to put their names forward and have the confidence to say, "Do you know what? I'm going to put my name out." It's scary for men and women. I think it is, because everyone's going to judge you and you're just public all the time.

So be confident, go for it, and the voters will decide.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Deb, you were in this place for quite some time and you were able to observe what took place here and what positive representation looked like and maybe what not such great representation looked like. Can you comment on diversity? Should this place, the House of Commons, be open to women who come from various points of view, various faiths, various backgrounds, and various socio-economic situations, or should it just be one type of woman who runs to be in this place, to represent her constituents?

Hon. Deborah Grey: I'd say the broader the base, the more fabulous it is, because of what Canada is. Joanne and I were just saying that I live at one ocean and she lives at the other. There's a whole lot of space in between and a whole lot of incredible people in between. I think we need to be able to say that we want all kinds of women, all kinds of very diverse backgrounds. Bring us your point of view, because that's what this place is. It's just nothing more than a great big place where we share everybody's points of view.

Through respect, I think it's wonderful to be able to reach out, but not put a number on it and to encourage people by saying, "Put your name on the list. Let's see what you can do and see if you have the backing of the people for nomination, and then in the general election." Don't put them, as women, in some riding they don't have a hope of winning. That's pathetic to me, when they say, "Look at all the women we ran." They didn't have a hope of getting elected, but we put them on there and we look virtuous. No. Put capable women in from all backgrounds, and then we're able to share and make this country a much better place.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you, Deb.

You opened up your remarks by saying, "This is what I am and this is what I am not." That leads into my question. What are the qualifying factors for being a successful member of Parliament? If I need to qualify that by saying "successful female member of Parliament", then so be it. I leave that to your discussion.

Hon. Deborah Grey: I was always asked that question, "What's it like to be a female member of Parliament?" I'd say, "I don't really know, because I've never been anything else." That's all I have.

I have mentors. Agnes Macphail, whose bust was put up near the lobby while I was here, was an amazing woman. That was very long ago—I think in 1922. Some male MP said to her, "Agnes, have you ever been mistaken for a man?" and she said, "No, have you?" That, to me, is a wonderful woman who has the confidence to be able to defuse these potentially ugly situations with humour.

I was blessed in my career to be able to do that when being attacked. I had someone on the street in Radway, Alberta, say to me, "Well, you look smart, but you have two things against you. You're a schoolteacher, and you're a woman." Just about the only regret in my entire political career is that I didn't get his name and address, because I wanted to phone him but I didn't know who he was.

So be capable and confident. Just do it.

● (1605)

Ms. Rachael Harder: Deb, what are the things that we can do, as female members of Parliament, to help encourage other women to consider this as a role? You only have about 30 seconds.

Hon. Deborah Grey: Okay.

Go find people. Say, "We want you to run on merit. You happen to be a woman, but we think you would be good because you have capabilities. Throw your name forward, and leave it to the great unwashed to see how it goes."

How did I do for time?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Very well.

Hon. Deborah Grey: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

We'll now go to Anne for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, I would like to apologize to everyone for being late. I was listening to Thomas Mulcair's speech, since today is his last day. He was a great leader, and was my leader for several years, so I wanted to say goodbye in person.

So here I am. I missed all of your presentations, but I am trying to catch up on what I missed through my colleagues' questions.

I wish I could say that women and men are treated fairly and equally in politics and that women do not need much help, but the fact is that women hold just 27% of the seats in the House of Commons in 2018, and just over 30% at the municipal level. You provided a few figures about their representation provincially. In reality, women do not necessarily come forward as candidates of their own imitative. It has also been shown that ads do not provide enough positive female role models.

Ms. Mailloux, I would like to hear your thoughts about female role models. Are there enough of them?

From what I heard, you spoke about mentoring. In 2017, at the municipal level, there were various groups that trained women to encourage them to run for office.

Do you think this kind of tool should be better organized and made available to women? In my own case, I did not make the decision myself to run for office. I did it because a friend convinced me. In the end, I thought why not. I am sure there are many other women in this situation. Finally, it is an exceptionally stimulating experience. If no one had pushed me to become a candidate, however, I would never have thought of doing it myself.

You talked about quotas. Not everyone around the table agrees with that, and that is fine. In Rwanda, for instance, 60% of the people who ran for office were women. It does seem, however, that the quotas imposed in various countries have had a major impact.

Can you give us your thoughts on this?

Ms. Thérèse Mailloux: I will start by answering your last question.

The data gathered in various parts of the world clearly show that where there are quotas... Actually, not all countries are successful because quotas are always imposed in a specific context, in a country with a specific history and specific traditions. So the results can vary greatly.

In general, the top 20 or 30 countries on the Inter-Parliamentary Union list have quotas prescribed by law or in their constitution, or quotas the parties impose on themselves. In the Nordic countries of Iceland, Finland, Sweden, and Norway, for instance, it is the political parties themselves that imposed the quotas. Behind all that is a history that we do not have, but those countries have been striving for equality for a hundred years. So even if they do not have quotas prescribed by law, it is nearly as strong.

Once again, I truly believe that the political parties hold the key to change and that it should be up to them. Too often, the burden is placed on women to enter politics, but they are up against millennia of systemic barriers that make it very difficult for them to run for office, for a whole host of reasons that everyone here knows and that I will not repeat.

The parties have to break the mould, as I said in my presentation. They have to take a different approach. They need to do more than simply wait, as they are doing, because while they are trying to convince one woman, there are 10 men lining up to be elected. It often takes a bit longer to convince women to run. They also have to plan their entry into politics much longer in advance. In short, different and modern methods are needed and different networks must be used. We know very well that men and women are not necessarily in the same environments. Women have not necessarily acquired management responsibilities in the same arenas as men. So the parties have to make that effort. That answers your first question.

As to mentoring, I would like Ms. Lapointe to talk about that because she has done a lot of mentoring of aspiring women politicians.

● (1610)

Ms. Esther Lapointe (Director General, Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie): Thank you, Ms. Mailloux.

I would like to remind the audience that Canada ranks 60th in the world as to the representation of women in politics. Until recently, France was quite close, between 50th and 60th place. Thanks to the parity law that France passed recently, it is now in the top 15 countries. This does have an impact and studies have shown it. Ms. Mailloux talked about the study by Manon Tremblay, a political scientist at the University of Ottawa, who is known around the world for her work on this topic. All the studies show that the political parties' selection and recruitment of candidates are the key to parity.

We have talked about mentoring, training, support, and various types of assistance for women. As Ms. Mailloux said earlier, our group has been doing this for 20 years. We started at the municipal level for a very simple reason: they had fixed election dates. Now all levels of government have fixed election dates. This is very good news for democracy, but also for women because they need more time to prepare.

Because of the way we were socialized, we have been accustomed from birth to playing a role in the private sphere as opposed to the public sphere, unlike boys. That has an impact on how we react later in life.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Your time is up.

Ms. Esther Lapointe: Okay.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We're now going to Mr. Fraser for seven minutes.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Excellent.

Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

I'm going to split my time with Mr. Fisher, so if we could keep the answers short so I don't eat up his whole clock, that would be greatly appreciated.

First, I'm really interested in the idea of how we can better recruit those capable, competent women who are out there—and they are out there in great numbers across Canada. I was really interested in my colleague from the NDP's comment about needing to be asked to run.

We heard in a panel during our previous meeting that it's a more natural occurrence for men to just kind of assume that they're destined for politics and leadership, whereas women more likely need to be encouraged to take that step, even though they may be every bit as qualified to do so.

Ms. Grey, you gave some advice for potentially the women who is competent, who is capable.

I'm curious, Ms. Bernard and Ms. Grey, to hear if you have thoughts on what we could recommend to the government that they could do to help more of those women who are capable and qualified to come forward.

Hon. Joanne Bernard: In 2011, in Nova Scotia, the Status of Women for Nova Scotia held a campaign school. There were about 67 to 70 women. Out of that school, out of that graduating class over a weekend where we learned strategies about campaigns, politics, and everything you need to know about politics, came a cabinet minister, an NDP MLA, a mayor of Yarmouth, and two other women who weren't successful. It's imperative that governments across the country, provincially in scope, do campaign schools and bring in completely non-partisan speakers and tell it like it is.

We had one in Nova Scotia two weeks ago. There were 160 women from all walks of life there, who will eventually put their name on a ballot or will eventually support women who will do that. That networking is absolutely crucial. The mentoring is second to none. I can't emphasize that enough.

● (1615)

Hon. Deborah Grey: I agree with her.

I'm sure you and I have done any number of campaign schools, so this is good. I know that the Manning Centre out in Calgary runs one for small-c conservatives—but it's as non-partisan as you can be when someone is going to run for a party—to be able to give just basic campaigning skills, basic networking skills. That's really good.

I heard a story over coffee last night of a women who was running on the Liberal ticket in Toronto. She just got pounded down because they wanted the seat for someone else—a fellow—who was more special. Guess what—he won. That made me really sad.

Without any partisanship, when any woman puts her name forward and looks like she's going to be okay, and then either a man or a woman says, "No, you can't do that. Why did you do that? It would be more competitive for us" or "It will not be good because you'll be there, but I want my star candidate here who happens to be a male".... Shame.

Teach them. Encourage them. Mentor them.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Excellent. I'll give the remaining time to Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thanks, Madam Chair. Thank you very much, Sean.

Minister, or Joanne—sorry, old habits die hard—I want to thank you for your work in politics, but also your work before politics in the non-profit sector and since with Easter Seals. I've already seen the changes you've made in Easter Seals and it's incredibly positive.

Hon. Joanne Bernard: Thank you.

Mr. Darren Fisher: You outlined a letter from when you were on the campaign trail. I know you inferred and maybe made reference to some more hatred and homophobia that came your way after you were a minister and a brand new MLA, both at the same time. I'm interested in how that affected you. Did that strengthen your resolve? Did it right away beat you down to the point where you thought I can't do this and then it strengthened your resolve?

Ms. Grey said "DSI", don't sweat it. When you're a new minister, a new MLA, and a new politician, did that strengthen your resolve? Did it beat you down? Can you outline the process? Then, because I'll probably run out of time and I know you keep in touch with many women in politics right now in several groups, do you know of examples where this type of hatred might drive people out of politics?

Hon. Joanne Bernard: I do. In terms of the homophobia, it was very difficult for my family. Somebody once asked me, "Why don't more gay men or women run for politics?" In addition to all the stuff we may deal with because of our gender or something else, that's just one added target. It was a very difficult time.

The other difficulty was the sexism, the "She's gained weight, clearly she doesn't go to a food bank," or "She's a retarded c-word", and the death threats. Those all add up on somebody's psyche.

Nobody knew before I went into politics that I had a 20-year eating disorder. I didn't want to talk about it as a female politician because that, to me, was a sign of weakness and I didn't want anyone to see me as weak. We've talked to NDP MLAs who have been sexually abused as children or had violence against them as adult women, and then they will get a threat online about taking them out back and raping them. Those trigger the experiences that women have in their lives, and we've seen it in Nova Scotia. We've seen the cyber-bullying. We've all lived through Rehtaeh Parsons.

It's more insidious. It appears to be directed at women of perceived power. Whether that is your sexual orientation, your colour, your weight, how you dress, how you look, how you speak, it's more personal with women, much more personal with women, but that doesn't make us victims.

Fighting back, every time I got one of those stupid trolling pieces of garbage on Twitter, and 99% came from men, I would screenshot it and then I would tweet it out hoping that that man's mother, wife, sister, daughter would recognize it. There are all kinds of ways that we can cope, but it always bothered me and I didn't want to get that thick skin.

● (1620)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much.

We're now going to Ms. Kusie for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses here today.

[*English*]

Deb Grey, I remember being in the war room with you in 1997 where we sang together "We gotta sink the Bismarck". We didn't, but it was a good time.

Deb, we had the first female prime minister, first female leader of the official opposition, and as a former diplomat I say very proudly, the first female foreign affairs minister. Why? Why have Conservative women led the way in positions of leadership and on their own merit?

Hon. Deborah Grey: Kim Campbell was prime minister, as you said, in 1993. I think our current Prime Minister forgot to mention her one time when he was talking about how people have done so well.

I, Rona Ambrose, and you mentioned others, you as a diplomat—I'm pretty impressed by that. Why do they forget to mention it or why don't we mention it more, all of us as women regardless of party? We should, because it wasn't just the quota system where we're going to put you here. It wasn't you're attractive or you're not too heavy—I've struggled with weight, as well, over the years—or your earrings.... It's ridiculous, and all of us know those things. Prove them wrong. As we do that, we want competent people. I don't want somebody as a ditz to be up there and then have to defend her because she's a woman. Frankly, I really don't.

The capable people, all of whom have done a great job over the years regardless of party.... Alexa McDonough was there before Thomas Mulcair. I sat in the House with her. There's Audrey McLaughlin. I was there long ago when Audrey was there. These are capable women who did a good job in leadership. We need to celebrate them all regardless of party.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Deb, speaking of body image, I don't mean to open old wounds, but you were referred to by the former Liberal MP, Doug Young, as "more than a slab of bacon", yet you showed up here today talking about "I don't do stress; I do life" and "See it through. Get it done".

What are the core values that differentiate women in politics from deciding to be victims or deciding to be victors?

Hon. Deborah Grey: Yes, that was a hard day. I was talking about pork-barrelling. I thought somebody was spending too much money, so I asked about pork-barrelling. Poor Doug, who sat up in the left-hand corner with me when I was first elected, said into the mike loudly, "There is more than a slab of bacon talking there."

That hurts. It hurts dreadfully, but I thought it said a whole lot more about him than it did about me. That was unfortunate for him. It was sad for me and tough, but you get through it, don't you?

I could have said, "Oh, it's terrible", and I could have run to the media and said I'm offended, or I'm this or that. What a waste of breath that would be. Why don't I just carry on? To say those kinds of things about my earrings, or my weight, or what I am wearing today.... Guys, you're lucky. You just have to change your ties, so you really are lucky.

We do get criticized for that, but if I'm going to be a victim, everything is going to bother me. Instead I think, "No, I don't want to do that. I want to be blessed. I want to enjoy every day, and I want to do the best I can." Because of that, I promised myself and everyone else in my constituency and the country that I will be victorious, no matter what.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Wonderful.

Your former leader, Preston Manning, was criticized terribly for his glasses, his teeth, and his hair.

Your first legislative assistant, our former prime minister—and thank you for your mentorship to him—Stephen Harper, was criticized terribly for his hair and for his sweater vests. Is this type of criticism specific to women, or is this something we see across all people?

Hon. Deborah Grey: We have seen it, poor Preston and his voice and his haircut, and Stephen with the blue vest. I guess you've proved that it's really not just women who get attacked and made fun of. We have to lift the level a little on men or women to be able to say, "Is that valid?"

When people used to ask me what I thought of Preston Manning's haircut, I just said, I don't know how many times, "I don't care what his hair looks like on the outside of his head. I care what's on the inside of his head," and the same with Stephen Harper.

I guess that proves the point that nobody is free from criticism and vitriol, and we need to get rid of that across the board from sea to sea, provincially, federally, and municipally, because I know ugly things go on there, too, to men and women.

● (1625)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: You succeeded at a time that....

I think that's my five minutes.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): I'm sorry. It's only a five-minute round.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I do have another question that I can ask, but all right.

Thank you, Deb.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Marc, you'll have the last five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for their presentations. They are very helpful to us in our study.

[*English*]

I just want to go back a bit to the study here. We're talking about barriers to women in politics. We're talking about recruitment challenges. This issue of women in politics transcends all political parties. Some of the comments here are about a specific party, or not, or a member. I just want to get some specifics, because we really believe that we're not necessarily talking about merit, the merit of women in politics. The women MPs who are in the House are fabulous. The cabinet ministers are very competent, but we still have 26%, or 27% now since the few by-elections have taken place. We are still 60th in the world.

I don't understand the line of merit. Women MPs are very qualified, past and present. I want to bring it back to the study itself.

Ms. Grey, your experience is extensive. I remember, as a high school student, very attentively watching you on your bike and being the first Reform Party member.

I want to focus on the nomination. Are you suggesting that there is really nothing that a parliamentary committee here could recommend to the government to make changes in legislation, legislation that is in place for nominations at Elections Canada, or the party should not change because it is a fair playing field? Are there any recommendations that you might have tried in the past and weren't able to do that we should be looking at right now?

Hon. Deborah Grey: That's a good point. I'm not sure how governments can legislate nomination meetings. That would be a tough one. I'm sure you have some ideas on that, but they'd have to get the nomination first.

When I was here and sat with your uncle Benoît, I came in at a time when I didn't have to fight for a nomination. The Reform Party was brand new and they were looking for any conscious, warm body able to string a few sentences together. I'm serious. I was acclaimed as a candidate, and then I was blessed by being re-elected several times after that.

It's important that people who are testing the waters for nominations.... Women have networks as well, maybe not as wide as the men's—certainly in my day, theirs were not as wide as the men's—and they need to get over the fear of running and the fear of losing. They need to be able to develop those networks. Sitting MPs should mentor people, and tell them, "I believe in you. Let's have coffee, and let's talk about whether you're really going to go through with this."

The nomination meeting is the key to everything, regardless of party. If we know a university student who wants to go to campaign school, let's rustle up some money and send them off to campaign school. Maybe they don't have money for it or they don't know enough people to do it, so you say, "I'll throw a coffee party for you." This is a practical way to help them get to know some other people who could build a team for them for the nomination.

● (1630)

Mr. Marc Serré: A comment was made earlier about the belief that a woman at a boardroom table got there because she is a woman. But there's also men at the boardroom table who got there because they had a golf membership or were part of a men's club. There's a variety of factors at play, so I just don't understand that argument.

[*Translation*]

I would like to return to Ms. Mailloux,

As to nominations, what specifically can we do? We have heard—and Ms. Grey said this also—that it is not necessarily the government, but rather the political parties that have an important role to play.

What can all the political parties do to truly increase the number of women in politics?

Ms. Thérèse Mailloux: The political parties have to take stock of all their recruitment and selection practices to see how they could recruit more women. They have to set a target and it has to be planned. Of course there have to be more women on selection committees, otherwise...

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you. Sorry to cut you off. We do have limited time.

We're going to suspend for about two minutes while we change the panel. Then we'll proceed with the second panel.

● (1630)

——— (Pause) ———

● (1630)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Welcome back to the 109th meeting of our committee.

I'm pleased to welcome Karen Sorensen, the mayor of Banff, and Jenelle Saskiw, the former mayor of Marwayne, Alberta.

I'm going to turn the floor over to you, Mayor Sorensen, for your opening statement. You have seven minutes.

● (1635)

Ms. Karen Sorensen (Mayor of Banff, As an Individual): Thanks so much. Certainly thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

I have a quick biography. I was first elected as a Canadian Rockies school board trustee in a by-election in 1996 and was re-elected in 1998. In 2004, I successfully ran for town councillor in the Town of Banff and was re-elected in 2007. In 2010, I was acclaimed—which is really the way to go—as mayor of Banff and was re-elected in 2013 and 2017.

I can certainly assure you that being the mayor of Banff is a privilege and a unique opportunity in our country as the municipality of Banff sits in Banff National Park, the world's finest national park. It's a very special place in the world, and I get to call Banff home.

I also have the very influential titles of wife, mom, step-mom, daughter, sister, and aunt. That in itself may demonstrate a bit of a difference in genders where I, as a female, feel compelled to tell you about my whole self and to tell you that when I reflect on my accomplishments in this life, the greatest accomplishment has been raising two fine young men who respect women and who view those who are politically driven as most interesting.

On the topic of barriers facing women in politics, I certainly acknowledge that there is clearly a problem of gender balance in Canadian politics—federally, provincially, and municipally. Obviously we've been talking about statistics and those statistics tell the story. Just as another statistic, female mayors account for 18% of mayors in Canada.

This all stated, frankly, facing barriers as a woman in politics has not been my personal experience. I have not consciously experienced barriers against me based on my gender. I also live in a community where three of seven councillors are female, three of five trustees, as well as with an acting female superintendent of Banff National Park, a female CEO of Banff & Lake Louise Tourism, and a female president of the Banff centre. I live in a gender-balanced community. I am rarely the only woman at the table.

I can only speak from my personal experience and state my personal opinions. I have focused on three barriers today: the media, being a mom, and confidence. My first observation is that the media still treats women in politics differently than they do men. Social media, of course, has taken this to a whole new level. I believe a real barrier for some women to run for office is gender-based abuse. Male politicians certainly take a lot of criticism, too, and as just noted, even based on their appearance, but my personal experience is that it's not generally connected to gender in terms of abuse.

Any woman who has political aspirations that spends 10 minutes on Twitter following their female mentors may be simply afraid to run. Women see how women are being treated and they get the message. Their response is, "Thanks, I'll take a pass."

These are some sample tweets from Alberta when a female MLA crossed the floor from the Conservative Party to the NDP. "Now you have two blonde bimbos in that party that are clueless." "Sandra should stay in the kitchen where she belongs." "Dumb broad. A good place for her to be is with the rest of the queers."

Traditional media, I believe, is also still at fault. They spend time focusing on a female politician's domestic life, discussing her looks or her voice or her attire. The media really needs to ask themselves this. If they were reporting on a man, would they say the same thing or ask the same questions? They need, we all need, to stop asking if a woman can be both a politician and a mom, which is my next point.

Women have babies. Women are moms. Women are maternal and we're very good at it. Sadly, I believe there continues to be a suggestion that mothers who pursue political careers are not thinking of the best interests of their children, or having a mom in politics is somehow more damaging than having a dad in politics. In politics, probably in any high-demand career, women who make a point of making time for their children are still labelled as a weak link and not focused on the job at hand, yet the same effort is praised in men who are labelled as great dads for taking time for the kids.

Finally, I want to speak to confidence. Based on the feedback I've received, women who consider running and then don't speaks to a lack of confidence. They may not define it that way. Here's what I hear: "I don't know enough", "I'm not thick-skinned enough", "I won't get elected because my network isn't broad enough", or "I can't raise the money I will need to campaign effectively".

Whatever the rationale, it comes down to, from my perspective, confidence. I don't lack confidence. I never have. It causes me to pause and ask, why is that? If confidence is a barrier, and I believe it is, why are some more confident than others? Is it genetic? Is it childhood environment? Is it life experiences? Whatever it is, I'm pretty certain that talking about the lack of confidence isn't going to change it. Mentoring people to increase their level of confidence may.

● (1640)

What is to be done? On social media abuse and in traditional media gender reporting, don't ignore this. We can't excuse it. We can't normalize this. We must oppose it, and men must be on the front lines too. On moms in politics, make it acceptable to be on maternity leave as required, to nurse an infant in chambers or caucus or in the House. Don't lash out when a politician who is a parent has a child attend an event with them or get on a plane with them, or when the Prime Minister and his or her spouse require additional child care based on their professional schedules. Stop it. Children should be every parent's first priority.

On building confidence in future politicians, certainly I understand that campaign schools are becoming quite commonplace and I think that is great for actually both men and women. If they are female-specific, then maybe some of these conversations can be had, or at least practical education sessions on how to fundraise, how to door-knock effectively, how to stretch your network and how not to get too thick of a skin. Sometimes it hurts. Sometimes it just doesn't roll off you, and that's okay as it's part of the experience.

Confidence is a belief in yourself. You can't fake it. Really building confidence starts way before you are thinking about running for a political position. These lessons need to be engrossed in the education system and in society. Things like anti-bullying campaigns and creating places that accept all skin colours, sexual preferences, and body types are working. Maybe our next generation of women will simply be more confident.

The legitimacy of Canadian democracy depends on integrating more women into the political process. Barriers can only be removed when social attitudes about gender change. Whatever recommendations come out of this study, please know that removing barriers at one level goes a long way in making changes elsewhere.

I'll close with a comment on a debate that seems to be infiltrating parties and politics, the comment that women should be lifted to ministries and higher profile responsibilities based on merit, not just on a quota. Let me assure you, this is not an either-or. Do both. There are plenty of women with enough credibility to fill any quota. We're right here.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much.

We'll turn it over to you, Ms. Saskiw, for seven minutes.

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw (As an Individual): Thank you.

My name is Jenelle Saskiw and I've been actively involved in politics and municipal government for over 20 years. Politics has always been in my blood. A fond memory for me was when I was 16 years old, attending the Forum for Young Albertans, sitting in the legislature, and pondering whether I had the ability to run for office and influence change.

The desire was always within me. I was encouraged to run for municipal office in 2004, and at the age of 29, I successfully ran and was elected in my hometown of Marwayne, Alberta. I held my position for 14 years, five as a councillor and nine as the mayor. I must admit, political barriers were all around me, but I never let them define me. I had a commitment to my constituents, who had placed their trust in me, and I had a desire to make a difference in my community. It took time, and as the years passed, my confidence grew, my knowledge base expanded, and I enjoyed new challenges and opportunities.

I continued my political path and held positions with the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association for seven years, and with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities for four. I chaired many committees at the local, provincial, and national levels, including the national municipal rail safety working group, where I was able to work with many members of Parliament to develop, and eventually pass, Bill C-52, the Safe and Accountable Rail Act.

I found myself becoming even more engaged and partaking in many events, such as campaign schools for women, attending Equal Voice's events, and helping local women, minorities, and youth run their campaigns. I love municipal politics but must admit that the life was difficult. Balancing municipal commitments and my family life —I have four children—became more and more stressful. In August of 2016, at the request of my family, I stepped away from politics to bring balance back to my family life. My children were growing and I knew I could never regain these precious years with them.

I think women do face the challenge of succeeding within a male-dominated political party. We consider the impact politics will have on our families, their welfare, and our future careers. We fear overzealous media attention, and we tend to lack confidence in our ability to serve effectively. We tend to have the perception that the political arena is biased against us. I feel that women need more convincing than men do to even consider running in an election, even when the seat is clearly winnable. Women who are, in fact, solid candidate material still need to be persuaded. They feel they need to prove that the skills they draw upon from the workforce, home, and the community will indeed be transferable into political life. We are often reluctant to say yes to the opportunity, and for some reason, we feel like we lack the experience to serve.

I think there are areas of concern within the electoral process as well. It is time-consuming, complex, and there is a lack of information on how to run a successful campaign, including exactly what is involved in getting nominated. Studies conclude that men do raise substantially more money than women do as candidates and individual donors, and that men donate more money to male candidates. This, too, furthers the hesitation for us to even run, as we ponder whether we can afford to run a healthy political campaign.

Incumbents, particularly those in leadership positions, tend to be men. Incumbents receive most financial resources, political support, and visibility during the campaign. For example, in Canada, 84% of mayors were incumbent. As a result, most women, many of us campaigning for the first time, are unable to mount effective campaigns or develop our public profiles to win name recognition against the incumbent.

Party leaders also unanimously agree that parties struggle to keep women members engaged between election cycles. Lack of training and opportunities to exercise leadership often discourage us from maintaining political involvement. Furthermore, parties lack a strategy for retaining women candidates who do not win the nominations or elections, and then fail to prepare them for the next election cycle.

We have a perception that political ambition is an invitation for political scrutiny into our private lives, which could have an indirect impact on our families. The expectations of motherhood are still major deterrents for women to participate in politics. Many of us do, and we have to choose between caring for our family and our children or achieving our broader political goals.

From experience, I know it's a very difficult position to be in. The day I stepped away from politics was the day that part of my spirit died. I knew I had to leave. My children needed mom, and working away from home was taking a toll on my family's well-being. Could I return to politics? I could, but I could never return to participate in my children's youth.

● (1645)

I'm curious to know how many men have left politics for the sake of their family's well-being.

Social media is also becoming a more definite barrier for women in politics and is probably one of the most visible deterrents today. A 2016 survey of female politicians from 39 countries found that 44% had received threats of death, rape, beatings, or abduction, and 85% had said they were often subjected to humiliating sexist remarks from male colleagues. I must admit that this is one of the most concerning barriers for me as a female politician. I have been subjected to this harassment. It's raw, it's real, and at times it's terrifying. No matter how thick-skinned you think you are, it still hurts, and I do not want my children to fear for my well-being because of a comment that someone, who may not even know me, has made from behind a keyboard.

How can we improve representation of women in politics? We need to work together to build strong support systems, including role models, strong networks, and robust teams. We need society to encourage and promote women in politics. We need interaction with more current and past female politicians, because we are their role models. We need more campaign schools, legal advice, and possible networking opportunities. We need to work together to combat the negative aspects of social media and online bullying by creating an accountability mechanism to limit the harm caused by online aggressors. We need women to know that we are not alone in the race.

What will I do? My goal is to be a mentor, to allow women, friends, and my daughters to believe in themselves and to see how we can collectively ensure that barriers are removed and that more women can become more active members within our political and leadership roles.

It's easy to research and present, but it's up to our generation to step up and offer support and courage. Imagine if we all collectively put our energy and efforts into changing the future. My hope is that our next generation will be here discussing how barriers for women were eliminated, and to reflect on how together, our generation influenced that change in politics.

In spite of barriers, I have learned to deal with them, and my goal is to share my experience so that together we can continue to raise our fellow women to their highest political potential.

● (1650)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much to both of you.

We're now going to turn to our first round of questions.

Emmanuella, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you both so much for that wonderful testimony.

Ms. Sorensen, you mentioned that hopefully the next generation of women will be more confident. Other than getting women elected and having more equal representation hopefully as the years go on, I am a former teacher, and I know what I was able to do in the classroom with my 14- and 15-year-olds. I know what type of influence I had on my students and how much I was able to be a role model for them, and how much I was able to use the material that I was teaching them to have some type of impact.

What do you think about education, and how do you think this can help give our girls of the future more confidence?

Ms. Karen Sorensen: I believe education is trying to do, and probably in some instance is doing, a much better job and a very good job. If it's not within the actual walls of the school, there are all kinds of organizations now. It's not kind of Girl Guides and Boy Scouts anymore. There are absolute groups that focus on young girls and engaging them more in sport and in activities other than what has been traditional.

I actually do think the education system is moving forward, and socially we now can all do our part. If I'm asked to attend something in Banff with young girls, I make sure I'm there. You need to put yourself out as a role model. I feel pretty hopeful. I feel pretty hopeful with what Jenelle said, that maybe in another generation from now we will be talking about "remember when?" I really encourage us in the education system and it has to start before ages 14 and 15. I've had 14- and 15-year-old girls around my house, and we really need to start sooner than that.

My sons are 26 and 23, and it still shocks me when sometimes we have some young ladies in the house and how attached they are to their looks and social media and that's what makes them popular. For me, that part is still really disturbing. I would like to think maybe it's our five-, six-, and seven-year-olds and those new baby girls who are being born who won't have to be subjected to that.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

Ms. Saskiw, do you have any comments?

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: I do. It's important for us not only to educate our young girls, but to educate everyone.

I'm very proud of the fact that during my 14 years, and part of it was because I do have a young family and I wanted them to be very involved in what I did, I actually went and volunteered my time in the grade 3, 6, 9, and 12 classrooms and talked to them about politics and let them ask the questions. It's not only about empowering the girls in the classroom. It's about educating the boys and having that message spread across so that we know how everybody can encourage each other to raise each other up.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

You also mentioned that you left your political career for your family, which is very understandable. You said that you don't know how many men would have left their political careers for their families. I agree with you to some extent, although I know that some men have left their careers for their families.

On gender roles, traditional gender roles in both the house and in public life, how do you think a better balance could help the situation? What do you think we can do to find a better balance?

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: It's difficult. We're natural moms. I know that I could have stayed in that position but it was an instance when I was leaving for Montreal, for a conference, when my little girl stood at the doorway, crying, and said, "Mom, I don't want you to go."

There was another instance when I was working on rail safety and I was here in Ottawa for a week, and when I came home, my 14-year-old son was taller than me. How does that happen in a week? You can't get those times back. I think that having the proper support systems is critical. I have that. My husband is amazing, and I couldn't have done what I did without his support. But I also think there are times that he doesn't totally understand exactly what's involved in my leaving. Even coming here to Ottawa for these few days, I was frantically racing around the house trying to make casseroles, get everything organized, and sign school forms.

I think it's important just to be communicating. I think that's the most important key, because unless we communicate and educate, we have nothing. We have to share these stories and we have to support each other when we hear these stories, because they are real.

● (1655)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Because you had a supportive husband, you were able to do this for a very long time.

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: I was, absolutely.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: That is great, and it goes to show what educating boys about this and getting them on board could do, and how far it could bring the women as well.

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: Absolutely.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I don't know how well aware you are of the nomination process. I know that you said you went through a couple of them before you were acclaimed.

Do you find there are certain barriers that women face that men don't necessarily face in the nomination process before they even become actual nomination candidates, when they're starting to put their names out there and they're starting to look for the support they need in order to become nomination candidates?

Ms. Karen Sorensen: Yes, I think I alluded to that, too, in my comments, this whole confidence piece. In my experience, women seem to be a bit more timid about their ability to be successful. Again, I don't know why that is, and I think it's way beyond politics and way beyond this room. I think it has a lot to do with your earlier question about education, and how to raise a more confident group.

Politics is still very much tied to power and competition. An election is a competition, and those are stereotypically male fields. Masculine traits seem to be essential for politics. Some of the things I wrote down include logic, focus, independence, strength. Female traits—or what are called female traits, whether females have them, or males—include empathy, patience, nurturing, vulnerability. These are considered to be in the female world. Those aren't really tied to politics, so I think there has to be a balance there.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you very much.

We have Stephanie for seven minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to both of you, Jenelle and Karen, for being here today.

Jenelle, it sounds like your decision to leave politics was very much based on factors internal to you and to your family. I'm a mother as well. I have a young son who is seven years old, and it's very difficult to get on the plane every Sunday night and come back on Thursday, but I, too, am very fortunate to have a very supportive husband who in fact told me, "You have to do this."

In both of our cases, it sounds like we made our decisions relative to our families. I guess I'll leave it at that, but I wanted to know if there were any external pressures in terms of situations where you were publicly shamed or shamed by other people for being a mother and a politician, for making that choice to commit yourself to public life at the same time that you had a young family.

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: In terms of being publicly shamed, no, but you always did get the comments about what you were wearing, what you ate at a certain function. Sometimes I'd get so angry because I'd feel like we had a really confident meeting or a confident presentation and somebody would make a comment about my shoes rather than what I actually said.

A determining factor for me was actually a disgruntled resident who phoned our house at five o'clock in the morning and asked if I would come and meet him downtown. He was upset about a downtown revitalization project we were doing in Marwayne. Maybe it was just a feeling in my stomach, but I did not choose to go and meet him. He phoned back with some subsequent phone calls that got more and more hostile as the conversations continued, enough that I did phone the police. Later that evening that gentleman was found deceased on a rural road after he had committed suicide. I often wondered what would have happened if I had gone and met him.

It was timing. When my kids were little, they didn't really know.... Time was different for them. As they got to be teenagers, they fully understood what it meant for me to be gone for four or five days. I was feeling those pressures, and then when that incident happened I really did have to step back and say, "Is this worth it? Why am I here?" That was when I chose to leave.

● (1700)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Those are very tough questions. I know my best friend, on my nomination day, went to a door and she said, "I'm here to see if you've cast your vote." The lady said, "Yes, I have cast my vote." My friend asked, "Can I ask if you voted for Stephanie?" And the lady said, "I just thought about that little boy at home and I just couldn't bring myself to do it, and I voted for her male competitor." My friend is truly a friend because she said, "Shame on you"—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: —and walked down the steps.

Something that allows me to do this is the belief that somehow I am giving something to my son through contributing to the country and what I aspire for it to be. I always tell people that the House sits for 26 weeks but for 26 weeks there are commitments in the constituency. You do international travel, there are caucus commitments, but your time is flexible. So I'm very fortunate. I get to vacation with my son when many Canadians don't have the opportunity to do that. I like to think I'm giving him opportunities later in life. I was fortunate to do this as a diplomat as well for him.

I'm not sure if I use it more as a justification to myself or to others, but my question is this. What were the benefits that you felt you were giving your family during the time that you were doing this service? It is a tough balance between those two things. Your contributions to society.... We would be foolish if we didn't say personal ambition doesn't play a part, but for them you like to think that they'll go to a better university or they'll be in a better network of opportunities later in life, potentially.

What were some of the benefits that you felt made you consider staying in politics?

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: There are really so many benefits. I've often told people that my kids can learn how to cook from a cookbook. They can't read a piece of paper and learn how to be a leader. They're following me. They're watching me. I think that I have raised four very well-rounded children who have had a lot of unique experiences. In our small community we don't even have a restaurant, for goodness sake. If an MP or a MLA came to visit me when I was mayor, they had supper at my table with my children sitting around. My children were part of the conversation. I have absolutely no regrets. They are strong leaders, and have proven this even through school, being president of the student's union. My son, who just graduated, is going into political studies, and I know that he will be a politician one day. It's in his blood.

There's a ton of benefits. As I said, it's the exposure, the knowledge. I have always shared with them. When I left, they knew where I was going, what I was doing, and what we were going to be talking about. My children know more about world politics and life than probably most adults, truthfully. As I said, you can't pick up a piece of paper and learn from a book. That's the type of education and those are the experiences that they've had, and they'll be enriched because of that forever.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

Karen, in 30 seconds, what is the root of your confidence, please?

● (1705)

Ms. Karen Sorensen: I ask that question. I'm not 100% certain, although I guess that if I have to pick I think it's the way you are reared as a child. I think it's your childhood environment.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Values matter, people.

Ms. Karen Sorensen: Exactly. That's where I would place it. I always wanted to be engaged. Even in elementary school, I wanted to be the school president. I don't really know if it's innate or learned, but I think it has to be partially learned.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Quach, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank our two witnesses. They are smart and caring women who want to see greater participation by women across Canada and around the world. They are also outstanding role models for the next generation. It is also reassuring to hear that there is still hope, although there is certainly a lot of room for improvement.

We talked a lot about work-life balance. Some people have said at times that work-life balance is also important to men. For decades, social roles have meant that women play a greater role in child rearing than men do, unfortunately. This is changing, however, which is a good thing.

In recent years, a number of women in Parliament have had children. In 2014-15, a number of colleagues and I were fortunate that our spouses agreed to be stay-at-home dads, which allowed us to continue our work here. Your spouse has also made it possible for you to continue to be a mayor or councillor for 14 years.

Do you think that government, as well as the media, should play a role in promoting work-life balance and supporting services such as childcare that allow women to have some peace of mind when they return to work? In the case of those who work in politics, do you think the government should promote the establishment of childcare services with schedules tailored to politicians' working hours?

[*English*]

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: I can comment on that. I'm from a very small village in Alberta of 600 people. When I first got elected.... My last baby was born on a Friday and she came to Monday night's council meeting with me. I've been there. I've done it. My kids have coloured underneath meeting room tables. They've lived the life.

I think there has to be some concern for proper compensation as well. When I was first elected as mayor, I was paid $50 as a per diem for every meeting I attended. With a babysitter for four kids, I went in the hole. For two years, until I convinced council to allow us to raise the rates to $100 per diem, I actually lost money on every single meeting that I attended.

It wasn't financial gain. It wasn't anything else. It was because I truthfully believed in and loved what I was doing. I think it's really important to ensure that we look at everything as a well-rounded balance, to see where we can offer extra services, especially in rural communities. We don't have a day care. You rely on the girl down the street. You hope that she's free so that she can come and watch the kids for you in the evening, but it could be that she has an exam the next day and has to be back home by nine o'clock.

I think that we have to look at how we can ensure that we have these resources in place that are fully rounded for absolutely everybody, regardless of where we are geographically and what age our children are. Are there opportunities for us to be able to bring them to work where we can have that accessibility to them if they need it?

We are making vast improvements. The change from 2004 to 2018 is wonderful, and it's amazing to see the moms who are bringing their babies into the office with them. I hope that continues, but as I said, I think there are other areas we can look at, especially in the remote geographical areas. This is still a real issue for them.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you.

Would you like to add something, Ms. Sorensen?

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Sorensen: Along the lines that Jenelle was saying, as another thing in terms of encouraging women to run, again I will speak to my experience. I certainly did not choose to run for municipal politics. God bless municipal politics, where you get five calls at five o'clock in the morning to come down the street. I rarely go to the post office at noon hour. My motivation was not financial. Probably none of our motivation is financial. This is not an industry where you make a lot of money. My motivation was not power. I don't know whether this is more of a female trait than a male trait. I'm certainly not suggesting it is. My motivation and that of the women I have met in politics really is about making a difference and engaging. It's wanting to be at the table and wanting to be engaged.

When I became a councillor, it wasn't so that I could be the mayor one day. That's just the way it worked out. I'm kind of bossy and I like to chair the meetings.

Again, in terms of motivating women, it's about wanting to be engaged and make a difference in our children's lives.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you.

Ms. Saskiw, you worked in a very rural region. Did you notice any additional barriers? You worked in the transportation sector. Could promoting public transit in rural communities encourage women to go into politics?

[*English*]

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: Because of our geographical location, public transit is difficult. When you have communities that are spread 20 or 30 minutes apart, it's really hard to be able to establish a system that would be reliable and be used by a lot of people.

Ms. Karen Sorensen: As well, transit is expensive.

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: Yes, expensive. That's exactly it. My little village has a hard time paying for broken sidewalks. We never could think about having a transit system in our community. That's our reality.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Ms. Sorensen, your organization, Ask Her, provides tools for women.

Do you thing the government should invest more in similar organizations and even establish institutions to encourage more women to enter politics?

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Sorensen: I've never been to a campaign school and I've just learned about them in the last little while. Whether it should be the federal government, provincial governments, or municipalities, obviously any education is good education if it helps encourage women to run and maybe builds their confidence a little and explains how. There is a fast way to door-knock, but some people just don't learn that until they know it.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Sorry. That's your time.

We're going to go to Marc for seven minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for sharing your experience. I was also a municipal councillor and school trustee. Thank you for your work and commitment.

We have heard that 30% of municipal councillors are women. That is higher than at the provincial and federal levels. Based on your experience, can you tell us what leads more women to go into municipal politics rather than provincial or federal politics?

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Sorensen: There are a couple of things. For me, and with respect to all women who make this choice, I personally chose to be in the community in which I live. One of the big draws to school boards and municipal politics is that you get to be at home. I don't fly to Ottawa every Sunday, or even up to Edmonton. For me, that was a very big part of it.

Honestly, for me, it's the partisan piece. I'm happy not to have a party. I'm happy to make decisions and be elected and stand on points that reflect my values. I totally embrace diversity even at our small council table in the Town of Banff, but I can always feel confident that I can speak my mind, make decisions, and vote in a way that is based on my values. To me, that is precious.

Mr. Marc Serré: Do you have anything to add?

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: I have to agree with Karen. As she said, it's the non-partisan aspect.

Mr. Marc Serré: On the non-partisan aspect, obviously in Parliament here we have Bill C-65, which all parties have been working on together, on the harassment on the Hill and working towards improving this.

You mentioned in your opening remarks about social media and how that is possibly a factor in preventing women from entering, especially federal, or all levels of politics. Can you elaborate on that?

● (1715)

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: I think we can look at it two ways. It's how we choose to empower social media. Right now there is a very negative connotation with social media, with negative remarks, comments, the visible bullying that goes on right now.

What can we do? How do we educate our public so that we can start using social media as a positive tool?

It's a great resource. What a fantastic way to be able to create an online network. For some reason we're hesitant to utilize it and develop it in that form. What can we do together to turn that negative into a positive? As I've said, we have an amazing tool but we aren't utilizing it right now.

Ms. Karen Sorensen: I would just say that social media isn't going away—it's just not. I think that my personal way to deal with this is that I frankly very rarely will tweet about something controversial. I tweet about good things and positive things and what's happening. Maybe that's a coward's way out, but that's how I manage my social media. We have lots of good things happening in Banff. I find that I'm generally able to tweet very positively.

Who was it that said they took the picture of the feedback and reposted it? Yes, that's a good idea. It's hard. I refuse to debate anything on social media. Sometimes if able, I will send a private message saying here's my mayor's email address and please email me your comments. I'll deal with it professionally through my office, not on social media.

Mr. Marc Serré: I wanted to go back to your comment about rural areas and some of the barriers.

I don't have official statistics in Parliament here, but it appears that a lot of the women candidates lost in rural ridings at the federal level.

Do you have any insight on some of the challenges you have in rural areas specifically related to us here so we can see the barriers?

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: I actually think that the networking opportunities in rural Canada are very different for men versus women. By choice, my husband golfs. He curls. He's the one who takes the boys to hockey practice. He has that social networking. I'm at home. I think we need to somehow increase these networking opportunities that allow women to be able to engage not only with each other but with men as well so that people realize the potential that every candidate has.

My work as mayor for 14 years.... As I said, I was doing some really incredible things even here on the national level with rail safety. I still have people who say, "Really? You did rail safety work? We didn't know that." As I said, we just have to be able to create these events and these opportunities where we can do the outreach together.

Ms. Karen Sorensen: I think that's a great question.

There are a couple of things with the percentage of incumbents who are female. It's sort of like once you prove yourselves, then we'll re-elect you. If that comes into play or not.... The other interesting thing is that I think there is an awful lot of focus on getting women to run. I think there has to be a shift in that to helping women to get elected.

I just joined a board in Calgary. It's called Ask Her. It's basically Calgary municipal politics. They formed for the last municipal election. They had 21 women run. Three were elected and two were incumbents. At my first meeting I said that I think we should change the name to "Elect Her". It's one thing to ask, but I agree with you, I think the problem is sometimes getting people elected.

There's a plethora of reasons why. I think that's another element to look at. It's not just about trying to get women to run. It's about getting them elected. Getting women in ministries or high-profile committees, etc., I think starts to tell the public that this is an acceptable thing to happen.

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: I did touch on that when we talked about the lack of interaction when somebody isn't successful for the nomination and what we do at the next election cycle. We do have that three- or four-year gap where we aren't utilizing our time wisely.

● (1720)

Mr. Marc Serré: Maybe government could help fund the Ask Her groups to help sustain that.

A voice: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): That's your time.

Thank you very much.

We're now going to Rachel for five minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Thank you.

Karen and Jenelle, thank you so much for taking the time to come and be with us.

Ms. Karen Sorensen: I'm happy to be in Ottawa. I have a few meetings.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Good. I'm glad. Hopefully, while you're here, you can even get a bit of time to enjoy Ottawa and all it has to offer.

We certainly appreciate your taking the time to share your thoughts and experiences with us. This has been really rich so far, and we look forward to gleaning from your testimony as we put together the report.

My first question is for Jenelle.

Jenelle, in your opening remarks you said that "barriers were all around me, but I never let them define me." It's a great statement. Can you explain that a little more?

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: To give you some insight, I was brand new to our community. We had lived in Marwayne for only eight months, I was 29 years old, and I was pregnant. That really was not the norm in rural Marwayne, Alberta, so when I ran, my intention was actually just to meet people in the community. I never intended to be elected.

There were barriers. I remember one of the first meetings I attended. A male councillor from another community actually told me, "You just sit down. I think what you meant to say was...", and he corrected my statement. It was very polite of him, but I soon corrected him, to the best of my knowledge. There were barriers, and these were the types of barriers. As I said, I was 29 years old and new to the community. People said things like, "What do you know? You've never lived here. You didn't grow up here. You don't understand what's involved here," but as I said, I never let them define me.

I was able to show people that I had a very unique point of view, and perhaps a refreshing point of view, because I didn't know the baggage and I didn't know the old family history names. None of that meant anything to me. All I knew was what I could see and the facts I could deal with. That's really what made me a strong, positive leader.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Awesome.

I'll get both of you to comment on this individually, because it came up a bit at the beginning of both of your testimonies. What could be done to influence the perceptions and the behaviours of young men and boys? Both of you mentioned this as being important. I'm wondering if you can expand on it more.

Ms. Karen Sorensen: I will just start by saying that to me—and I think Jenelle referred to this as well—it's not unlike what we do to influence young girls. You just need role models. As I said, I often had many young boys sitting around the kitchen counter debating pedestrian bridges, the cost of transit, and any number of other things, so it's role modelling for these young men, too.

I couldn't be prouder of my two sons. I really think we have raised and are raising a generation in lots of areas where this kind of conversation will happen less often. Role modelling and demonstrating.... Whether it's on TV, whether it's in their own home, or whether it's in their city or in a small community, showing gender balance will tell the story.

I'm going to just ask this. For the people who have young children, and even if you're in the background there, here is your tool. Sorry, it's off topic. Every night you're away, you make a paper chain, with the number of nights you're going to be away. Each night has a chain link. You write a note on it. Every night, they open up one of the pieces of paper. It shows them that the time you're going to be away is reducing. Then when it gets to one link, that means mommy or daddy is coming home the next day.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Don't make me cry, Karen.

Ms. Karen Sorensen: When you were talking, I thought, "I have to tell her about the paper chain trick."

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: It's very positive that we are in a different generation right now. I look at the conversations I have with my children. I have a gender-balanced family: two boys, two girls. We don't talk about differences in female or male, skin colour, ethnicity, or sexuality. We talk about everybody as people, as one.

I'm with you, Karen. I really think we are the leaders in this conversation, and that my children will not sit there and say, "She's a woman, so she doesn't deserve to be in that position," or "He's a man, so he's going to get the role." No. In fact, I had an instance where two of us were applying for a position on a board—

● (1725)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): That's your time. I'm sorry.

Ms. Karen Sorensen: It was the paper chain that took the time—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Karen Sorensen: —the best piece of advice.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Sean, you'll have the final five minutes.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to both of you. You guys are just awesome. I'm a young parent, and I'm definitely going to use the paper chain trick. My daughter is two. Occasionally when I tell her on Sunday night that "Daddy's going to work this week", she'll cry a bit, give me a kiss, and say, "Daddy back Friday?", and I say, "Yes, I'll be back on Friday."

There's one thing that I think could go a long way to improve things. The predictability of the schedule is awful, and it's much harder on women than it is on men, for certain biological reasons, like when you're nursing a newborn baby.

Tonight is a good example. We expect to be voting all night and potentially through to tomorrow night. I'm wondering if you think there are things that can be done from a procedural point of view, particularly in provincial legislatures and at the federal level, when you're actually pulled away to a different part of the country and you can't just jet home quickly.

You mentioned that it's nice to be in municipal politics because you're at home, but that's not an option for a lot of people who aren't based in Ottawa, for example. Do you think something could be done to say that there's going to be certainty, so that you don't end up giving four or five links in the chain only to realize that you're going to be gone for six or seven days? Do you think establishing certainty in the procedural schedule for legislative bodies would be helpful for this?

Ms. Karen Sorensen: Yes, absolutely.

Again, I don't think I understand your world. I understand the provincial world a bit.

That would drive me crazy. I think that's a great place for this committee, and not even just for the moms or the females but for the dads too. I know stuff happens, and I know you probably can't make everything work exactly the way you want, but all I can say is that I think that's a great suggestion. I don't know where you start or who has that conversation, but—

Mr. Sean Fraser: If I can interject, then, I'm agnostic towards this idea, but there was some debate around potentially removing Friday sittings so that you would know that every Thursday night you would get out. Is that something that you think would be helpful?

Ms. Karen Sorensen: I think it would be. Your electorate potentially will push back in another way—

Mr. Sean Fraser: Potentially you find another solution, maybe to sit for more weeks in the year or for longer hours during the days we're here. I'm just curious. I really don't have a strong position on this.

Ms. Karen Sorensen: In the world we live in and with how busy everybody is, I don't care what you're doing, it's important to know what your schedule is. Again, I think that is another huge benefit of municipal politics. I know exactly when my meetings are.

Also, guess what. I actually get to call them at six o'clock. We have a rule that you don't go for more than four hours in terms of one meeting—you're looking at me like "really?"—unless all of council agrees. Sure, we may have full-day meetings, but I can pretty much tell somebody that I'm good for a beer at 6:30.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I'm curious. With respect to the child care issue, the kids on the Hill program, which my daughter will be going to in August, doesn't have anything for kids who are younger than 18 months. I don't know what it's like in different provincial legislatures. Do you think that having on-site day care from infancy and potentially right up to school age would be a positive development that we could recommend? It would create an environment that would potentially make Parliament, legislative life, or municipal council more welcoming towards women who are thinking about running and who could get elected.

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: I think so, especially at the provincial and federal levels, absolutely. It's a little more difficult at the municipal level because we don't have set sitting days. Our schedules are sporadic, so that definitely makes it a little harder, but it's something that I would definitely encourage.

Mr. Sean Fraser: You both talked a bit about the importance of mentoring. It's a great thing that I think everybody agrees on. I don't want to put the pressure on women to find their own mentors, although I think it's great if they do. Is there something the government could be doing to help encourage that mentoring, such as maybe supporting community organizations that actually do this sort of thing already?

Are there other suggestions you might have? We're going to make recommendations to the government saying, "You should do this", and if you were standing in our shoes, what would you recommend the government do to increase mentoring opportunities?

Ms. Karen Sorensen: First of all, I think some kind of grant opportunity, particularly around campaign schools, maybe could have some benefit—

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: Even online.

Ms. Karen Sorensen: —and yes, even an online course.

I had another thought but I forget it.

Did you have anything else to add, Jenelle?

● (1730)

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: No.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Please feel free to follow up and get back to us if it comes to you.

Ms. Karen Sorensen: Yes.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thanks very much. I really appreciate it.

Ms. Karen Sorensen: It was our pleasure.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thanks, Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): You have 30 seconds, Sean. Did you want it?

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: Sean, I have a comment for you.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Sure.

Ms. Jenelle Saskiw: You have your baby girl right now. I left my kids when they were at the five-year-old to 10-year-old stage. Now that they're teenagers, they pack my bags for me. It gets better.

Voices: Oh, oh!

A voice: Yes, it does get better.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): Thank you to our witnesses. You were both fabulous.

I came from municipal politics as well.

Ms. Karen Sorensen: Yes, quite a few of you came.... I googled you all.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Pam Damoff): We're now going to go in camera.

I'm going to suspend for a couple of minutes. If we could quickly clear the room, the members of the committee will stay.

We shouldn't be too long.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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